THE MAKING OF A CITY.

By W. B. BRYAN.

The celebrated Swedish authoress, Fredrika Bremer, gives a curious and perhaps unique impression of Washington of a half century ago. In an account of her visit to this city, which occurred in the year 1850, she speaks of going to "the White House, the residence of the President, General Taylor, just out of the city." In contrast with this suggestion of the smallness of the then nation's capital may be quoted the description of an English traveler who came to Washington two years later. He says that the city consisted "of a number of streets lined with continuous rows of houses, several fine public buildings and a fine show of stores and hotels."

Contemporary writers saw in the nation's capital a combination of city and country. The contrast between the broad streets and generous spaces of the nation's city and the cramped and crowded appearance of other cities naturally made a deep impression on visitors then as well as now.

Fifty years ago the plan conceived by the French engineer, L'Enfant, and approved by Washington, was by no means filled out—only a beginning had been made. Pennsylvania avenue between the Capitol and the President's house was the main thoroughfare—Regent street, as an English visitor observed in describing it. Here were located the principal business places, the leading hotels and some of the best private residences. To the north of the avenue and within the section above described lay the main portion of the city. Towards the Potomac, as one looked southward, there were the commons, or downs, to use the expression of a visitor to whom the spectacle of the waste of vacant ground evidently suggested the desolate stretches of barren, unoccupied country in portions of England. Near the river front there were a few houses, and along the straggling plank wharves there were some timber and coal sheds. K street was about the northern limit of the residence section of the city, although in some localities the houses were pushing up as far as M street. In the immediate vicinity of the Capitol and of the navy yard there were groups of buildings, but the intermediate spaces were city lots yet to be built on. Within the corporate limits, according to the census of 1850, was a population of 40,000. This official enumeration did not deter the maker of the city directory of 1853 from saying that the population of Washington is estimated to be 49,339. With due allowance for an imagination, warmed by local pride, there is no question that in the year 1852 Washington was a growing and thriving town and that the figures of the census did not do full justice.

The local conditions were of course quite different from those of today. Some of the municipal proceedings sound strangely to modern ears. Then the city fathers enacted an ordinance for the extirpation of thistles in the city wards, and one to prevent householders from keeping swine within certain urban limits. It was during the same year that the mayor was directed by the city council to have the hours struck on the bell at the market house from 9 p.m. until 4 a.m. each night, and authority was also given to have a salute fired, at the expense of the corporation, as an expression of municipal joy over the coming of another anniversary of the birth of the republic. Permission was extended to colored congregations desiring to hold watch services on the last night of the year, to continue these services beyond the hour of 10 o'clock, as ordinarily all their places of worship were required to be closed at that hour.

Then, when the circus came to town, it was given a place to pitch its tents on a portion of the square occupied by the Center market, and no doubt on these occasions extra men were sworn in for police duty, as the regular force of fifteen men was not equal to the demands of an emergency. On ordinary occasions, however, police duty did not occupy the entire time of even this force, as the officers were expected to collect the fines and other moneys due to the corporation from the citizens. Only the previous year had provisions for a regular police force, to preserve the peace of the city in the daytime, seemed necessary, as up to that time the police magistrate, aided by the county constables, had been intrusted to perform this service. For a number of years previous, however, the city had the services of a night police force, known as the auxiliary guard, and also numbering fifteen men. The offices of chief of police and captain of the guard were for a brief period intrusted to one man, but in the fall of 1852 a city ordinance separated the two offices, so that thereafter the responsibility of directing the men who guarded the city at night and day was distributed between a chief of police and a captain of the auxiliary guard.

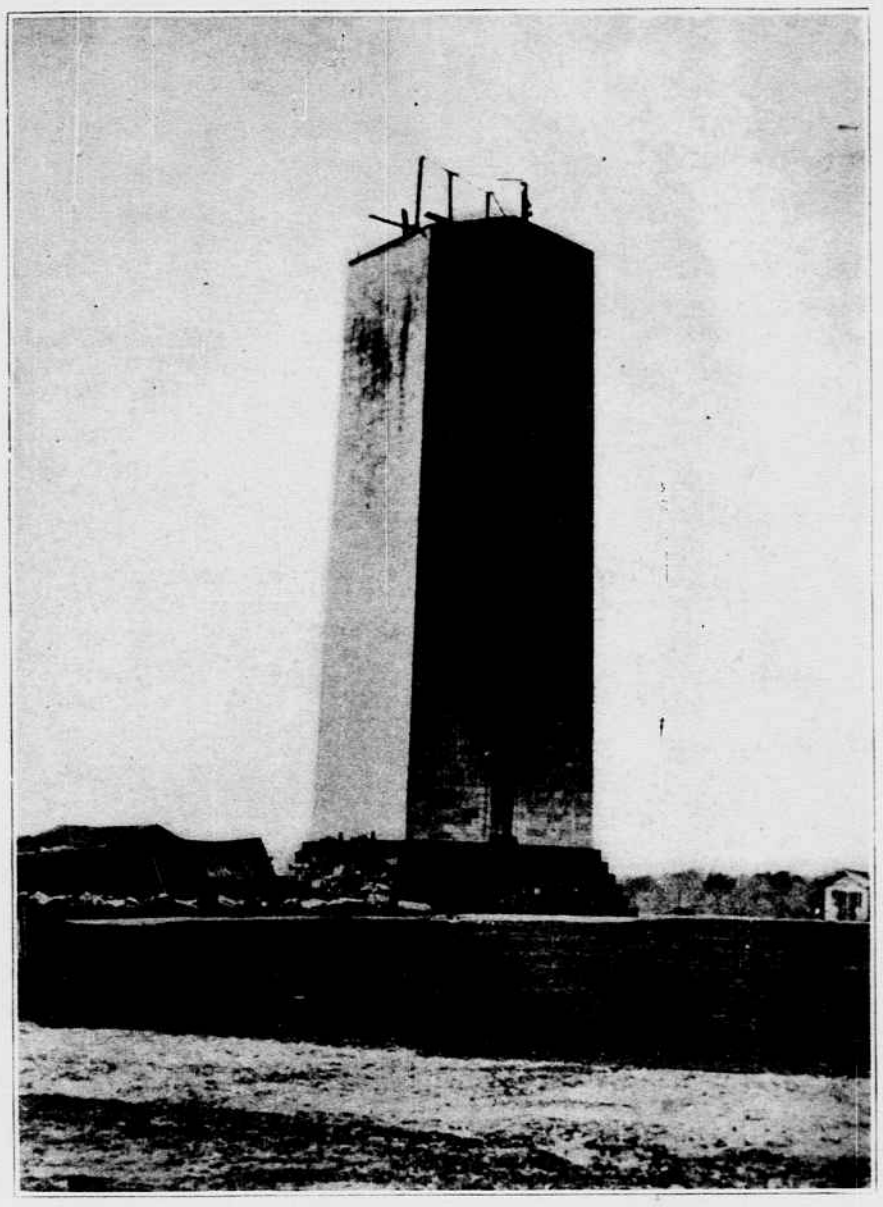
Street Improvements.

Street improvements in the year 1852 consisted mainly in grading and graveling the city thoroughfares. Except on Pennsylvania avenue, pavements were practically unknown. The central portion of Pennsylvania avenue, comprising a width of some forty-five feet, was paved with cobblestones, and a similar pavement extended from the avenue along 7th street as far north as G street. A small section of 14th and of 12th streets was paved with cobblestones from the canal to south B street, while a similar pavement was found on 17th street from Pennsylvania avenue to New York avenue. In 1848 the paving of Pennsylvania avenue from the Capitol to the President's house, as above described, was completed, and four years later the remainder of that thoroughfare, as far west as Georgetown, was similarly improved. Each year the city fathers provided money to bear the expense of clearing off the dust and mud which accumulated on the paved portion of Pennsylvania avenue. The street crossings of the avenue were marked by flag pavements, while the sidewalks were laid with brick. At night the rays of light from gas lamps assisted the pedestrians in finding their way from one place to another. The Washington Gas Company, which had been in existence only a few years, supplied the gas which was used in lighting the Capitol grounds and the Capitol, the President's house and the government departments, as well as the lights on Pennsylvania avenue and in the city hall building. However, those who wished to go west of 17th street on Pennsylvania avenue were obliged to be content with the less brilliant illumination of oil lamps, which were maintained on that section of the avenue until the year 1853, when they were replaced by gas lamps. Oil lamps were also found on other streets, where the corporate authorities in their wisdom saw fit to locate them. Water was conveyed from springs in the city, and from the vicinity of the city, to the public buildings and to some of the larger hotels, but the average citizen depended on his own wells or the corporation wells and the corporation pumps, which were maintained throughout the city and which constituted one of the largest items of municipal expense. There were, of course, no sewers except for the use of the public buildings, and the outlet of these was into the Washington canal. When an alarm of fire was sounded a response was made by the volunteer companies, who rushed through the streets, dragging their hand engines. At various points about the city square holes, six or seven feet in depth, were dug and lined with brick, laid in cement, and then filled with water. From such reservoirs and from wells the water was obtained for the use of the hand engines. Omnibuses, running on Pennsylvania avenue from the navy yard to Georgetown, and down 12th street, or 7th street, and over the bridges across the canal to the steamboat wharves, furnished the principal mode of communication. The fare was 6 cents or five tickets for a quarter. As a visitor to the city in that year makes record, it was necessary for a passenger in an omnibus to hand up the 6 cents or a ticket through a round hole in the roof, which was received by the driver, who gave change when such was due. When the driver was satisfied he loosened the strap, which kept the door fast, and then the passenger was enabled to leave the vehicle.

People who wished to leave the city and go north could take the train at the Baltimore and Ohio depot at 6 o'clock in the morning or at 8:30 in the morning, and if everything went well they might reasonably expect to reach Baltimore in about two hours and a quarter. The depot, which had been for a number of years at the northwest corner of Pennsylvania avenue and 2d street, had just been moved to the corner of New Jersey avenue and C street, where the present depot building had been erected. In the event the traveler's destination was Richmond or other points in the south, he would go to the wharf at the foot of 11th street, and, taking a steamer, reach Aquia creek, and there make connection with the railroad which went to Richmond. What was later known as the Orange and Alexandria road had built its line from Alexandria as far as Manassas, and during the year 1852 the people in that locality celebrated the completion of a branch of the road which extended as far west as the town then known as Salem.

Comparison With Other Cities.

All this sounds primitive to a modern ear, but in many respects the conditions in Washington were much the same as in other municipalities in that day, although in appearance Washington did not come up to the standard which a great many visitors were inclined to believe ought to be attained by the capital city of such a nation as the United States. In point of size Washington then ranked with such places as Albany, Buffalo, Newark and Pittsburg. The nation's capital was then the largest city south of Baltimore, with the exception of Charleston, S. C., which had about the same population, and New Orleans, which was very much larger. The steam railroad extended no further west than Cumberland, and Pittsburg had not then been connected with the east by railroad. Washington then was feeling the influence of the general prosperity throughout the country, which followed the close of the war with Mexico and the discovery of gold in California. It was an era of changes and improvements which made the decade following the year 1850 notable in the record of the material development of the city. By the year 1860 the population had increased over 20,000, and was then almost three times as large as the census record shows for the year 1840. Public and private improvements went on between 1850 and 1860 in greater volume than in any previous



THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT AS IT STOOD FOR MANY YEARS.

THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT OF TODAY.